

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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USIA-15 AID-20 PC-04 NIC-01 OMB-01 IO-14 EB-11 DRC-01

SPM-01 /146 W

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R 021410Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3850

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LAGOS 3808

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, NI

SUBJECT: GOWON ON NIGERIA'S FUTURE

SUMMARY: GENERAL GOWON'S MAY 1 BRIEFING OF NWC CONFIRMED THAT FMG HAS SHIFTED FOCUS TO DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, WHICH DOMINATED ENTIRE SESSION INCLUDING GOWON'S HALF-HOUR OPENING REVIEW OF MUCH OF NIE-POINT PROGRAM. BRIEFING COVERED NEW STATES AND BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS, CENSUS, CONSTITUTION, POLITICAL ACTIVITY, ROLE OF ARMED FORCES, CORRUPTION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND GOWON'S OWN FUTURE PLANS, AND LEFT STRONG IMPRESSION THAT MILITARY LEADERS NOW BEGINNING TO DEVOTE SERIOUS AND CONFIDENT ATTENTION TO PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN RULE PROMISED FOR 1976. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL GOWN RECEIVED NWC GROUP AFTERNOON MAY 1 FOR ONE-HOUR BRIEFING AND HALF-HOUR RECEPTION AFTERWARD. FLANKED BY SHQ, ARMY, AND AIR FORCE CHIEFS OF STAFF, GOWON OPENED SESSION WITH 30-MINUTE STATEMENT COVERING MOST ELEMENTS OF NINE-POINT PROGRAM AND THEN REPLIED TO QUESTIONS ON CORRUPTION, ROLE OF ARMED FORCES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE. AS IN PAST YEARS, ENTIRE MEETING WAS EXTREMELY RELAXED, WITH GOWON EVIDENTLY VERY CONFIDENTIAL

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MUCH AT EASE IN HIS ROLE AS HEAD OF STATE AND MAKING FREE

USE OF FIRST PERSON SINGULAR IN DISCUSSING FMG DECISIONS
AND INTENTIONS.

2. AFTER WELCOMING GROUP, GOWON POINTED T MAPS OF NIGERIA
ON WALLS AND LAUNCHED INTO DISCUSSION OF CURRENT TWELVE-
STATE STRUCTURE, ITS ORIGINS, AND PROBLEMS OF POSSIBLE NEW
STATES WHICH CONSTITUTES ONE ELEMENT OF NINE-POINT PROGRAM.
GOWON REAFFIRMED THAT CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF STATES
RULE OUT PURELY ETHNIC BASIS FOR THEIR FORMATION, AND
REVIWED PROS AND CONS FOR CREATION OF STATES NOTED IN
LAGOS A-77 (APRIL 24). HE REMARKED THAT FMG NOW RECEIVING
MANY PROPOSALS FOR NEW STATES, AND CONCLUDED THAT MILITARY
LEADERSHIP CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN DOING "HOMEWORK" PREPARATORY
TO TAKING NECESSARY DECISIONS ONTHIS QUESTION. GOWON
NOTED IN PASSING RELATED PROBLEM OF BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS
BETWEEN EXISTING STATES, WITH WHICH FMG ALSO PLANS DEAL,
THOUGH WITHOUT PERMITTING ITSELF BECOME BOGGED DOWN IN
MULTIPLICITY OF DISPUTES WHICH EXIST ALONG BORDERS.

3. TURNING TO RELATED QUESTION OF CENSUS, GOWON OUTLINED
PRECAUTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN OBSERVED TO INSURE ACCURATE
COUNT AND SAID FMG WILL "CONSIDER" CENSUS RESULTS LATER
THIS WEEK. HE EXPRESSED HOPE FINAL FIGURES WILL SHOW
POPULATION WITHIN UN ESTIMATESWHICH HE CITED AS RANGING
FROM 65 TO 75 MILLION, AND LAUGHINGLY WARNED THAT NIGERIA
WILL BE COMPETING WITH US POPULATION TOTALS IN NEW FUTURE.
(IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION, SHQ CHIEF OF STAFF ADMIRAL
WEY SAID "CONSIDERATION" OF CENSUS FIGURES INVOLVED SUCH
QUESTIONS AS ORDER IN WHICH STATES TO BE LISTED, I.E.,
WHETHER ALPHABETICALLY OR FROM LARGEST TO SMALLEST, BUT
ADDED FINAL WORD THAT RESULTS "MUST BE PUBLISHED" REGARD-
LESS OF LIKELY REACTION.)

4. GOWON THEN SPOKE ABOUT RESTORATION OF PARTISAN POLITICAL
ACTIVITY, WHICH HE AGAIN SAID WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED AT
LEAST UNTIL AFTER COMPLETION OF PRESENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN
IN OCTOBER 1974. SOMETIME THEREAFTER, HE CONTINUED,
POLITICAL ACTIVITY WOULD AGAIN BE ALLOWED, AT WHICH TIME
NATION (AND PARTICULARLY FMG) WILL BE ABLE TO SEE "WHETHER
WE HAVE LEARNED OUR LESSON" AND CAN MAINTAIN STABILITY
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IN OPEN POLITICAL SYSTEMS. (COMMENT: GOWON CLEARLY IMPLIED
THAT POLITICIANS WILL BE "ON TRIAL" IN INITIAL STAGES OF
OPEN SYSTEM, WITH MILITARY RESERVING RIGHT TO REVERSE
DIRECTION IF STABILITY SERIOUSLY COMPROMISED.)

5. FURTHER ALONG EVOLUTIONARY ROAD TOWARD CIVILIAN RULE,
GOWON SAID, WILL COME QUESTION OF NEW CONSTITUTION.
HE MADE CLEAR PRESENT FMG INTENTION IS TO CONVENE

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (THOUGH HE GAVE NO INDICATION HOW THIS WOULD BE DONE) AND TO PRESENT IT WITH CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFT FOR CONSIDERATION. HE INDICATED HE HAD NOT YET MADE UP HIS MIND WHAT THE GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE CONSTITUTION SHOULD BE. ONLY REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE CONTENT OF NEW FUNDAMENTAL LAW CAME IN SUBSEQUENT EXCHANGE DURING RECEPTION, WHEN GOWON SAID HE BELIEVES IT ESSENTIAL THAT FUTURE STRUCTURE PROVIDE CHANNEL FOR MILITARY TO MAKE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN ON MAJOR POLICY ISSUES BEING CONSIDERED BY GOVERNMENT.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3851

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LAGOS 3808/2

6. WITH FOUR OF NINE POINTS COVERED IN INITIAL BRIEFING, QUESTIONS DEALT WITH THREE MORE. FIRST QUERY ON CORRUPTION ELICITED REPLY FROM GOWON THAT FMG RECOGNIZED IMPOSSIBILITY OF TOTALLY ELIMINATING CORRUPT PRACTICES SHORT OF TOTAL MORAL REJUVENATION OF SOCIETY. HE SAID EFFORTS WOULD BE CONCENTRATED LARGELY ON PROSECUTING EXAMPLES OF CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, AS THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS DIFFICULT TO POLICE. HE ADDED THAT MILITARY REGIME THUS WILL BE CONTENT WITH SETTING GOOD EXAMPLE AND REDUCING CORRUPTION TO LEVEL WHICH DOES NOT EMBARRASS NIGERIA ABROAD OR SERIOUSLY THREATEN ITS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AT HOME. ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, GOWON REITERATED FMG INTENTION ASSURE BALANCED DEVELOPMENT WHILE ACCORDING TOP PRIORITIES TO NATIONAL DEFENSE, EDUCATION, AGRICULTURE, AND HEALTH.

TO THIRD QUESTION, ON ROLE OF ARMED FORCES, GOWON TACTITLY CONFIRMED PROBABILITY THAT ALL THREE SERVICES WILL ACQUIRE NEW EQUIPMENT TO ENHANCE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS, AND EXPRESSED HOPE THEY WILL ALSO BE ABLE BECOME MORE ENGAGED IN VIVID ACTION PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PRODUCING SOME OF THEIR OWN FOOD, WHEN CURRENT ARMY REORGANIZATION COMPLETED.

7. FINAL QUESTION DEALT WITH GOWON'S OWN POLITICAL FUTURE IN WAKE OF PROMISED RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE. AFTER THROWING CONFIDENTIAL

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UP HIS HANDS IN MOCK HORROR AND INSISTING THAT HE LACKS CRYSTAL BALL NEEDED TO ANSWER SUCH QUERIES, GOWON SAID THAT HE AND HIS GUEST SHARED COMMON SENSE OF DUTY TO COUNTRY AND COULD NOT REFUSE IF ASKED TO UNDERTAKE MISSION IN NATIONAL INTEREST. FORTUNATELY, HE REMAINED FIT AFTER EIGHT YEARS IN OFFICE DESPITE PRESSURES OF HIS JOB, SO HE WAS READY FOR WHATEVER FUTURE MIGHT BRING. HE UNDERSCORED STABILITY AND PROGRESS AS TRANSCENDING ALL OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND, BY IMPLICATION, COMMITMENTS.

8. COMMENT: EMPHASIS ON DOMESTIC ISSUES THROUGHOUT BRIEFING CONFIRMS THESIS PUT FORWARD IN LAGOS A-80 (APRIL 25) THAT FMG HAS SHIFTED GEARS AND BEGUN TO FOCUS MORE SERIOUSLY THAN EVER BEFORE ON POLITICAL QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN COMPLETING NINE-POINT PROGRAM AND PREPARING PROMISED TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN RULE IN 1976. WHILE GOWON MADE PASSING REFERENCE TO FACT TRANSITION WILL OCCUR "IF WE MAKE SUFFICIENT PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING OUR PROGRAM" AND IMPLIED POLITICIANS WILL BE "ON TRIAL", AND MILITARY WOULD BE PREPARED TO BACKTRACK IN CASE SERIOUS PROBLEMS ARISE, WHOLE TENOR OF HIS REMARKS SUGGESTED THAT TOP FMG LEADERSHIP NOW PROCEEDING ON ASSUMPTION OF CHANGE OVER TWO YEARS HENCE AND PLANNING ACCORDINGLY. THIS IMPRESSION FURTHER REINFORCED BY FACT SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC) MET ALL DAY MAY 1 AND IS HOLDING FURTHER SESSIONS MAY 2 AND 3. IN ADDITION TO "CONSIDERING" CENSUS, SMG REPORTEDLY TACKLING NEW STATES ISSUES AND PERHAPS OTHER ELEMENTS OF NINE-POINT PROGRAM AS WELL.

9. IN THIS REGARD, GOWON BRIEFING OFFERED UNUSUALLY COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF FMG INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO NINE POINTS. THIS MARKED FIRST TIME TO OUR KNOWLEDGE THAT HE SPELLED OUT FMG EXPECTATIONS IN SENSITIVE AREA OF CORRUPTION, ALSO FIRST SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO CONVENING OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND PLAN TO PRESENT SUCH BODY WITH FMG-DRAFTED CONSTITUTION AS BASIS FOR DISCUSSION. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, HIS APPROACH CONTAINED

NO SURPRISES (SEE LAGOS A-18, JANUARY 31), AND MADE CLEAR
THAT MOST OF KEY DECISIONS INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTING
NINE POINTS ARE STILL ON SMG AGENDA FOR THIS WEEK AND
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FUTURE SESSIONS.
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